



PRSS-3

Dharma and Religion: Unifying and Divisive Forces

By

Prof. Rajendra Singh* and Dr. Harish Chandra**

* Corresponding Author, Center for Silicon Nanoelectronics, Holcombe Dept of Electrical & Computer Engineering, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634, USA
Tel: + 1 864 656 0919, Fax: +1 864 656 5910,
Email: srajend@clemson.edu

** Dayananda Institute of Vedic Studies, 6-1-103/85
Abhinav Colony, Padmarao Nagar, Hyderabad 500 025,
India
Tel: + 91 (040) 2751 0245, 3114 1808, Fax: 2751 0256, Email:
divayes@eth.net

Keywords: Dharma; Religions – History, Characteristics;
Vedas

Abstract: Since advent of man on the earth, he must have always endeavored to meet his needs in the three domains of body, mind and soul/spirit. In classical India, Dharma adequately met these needs. It was the way of life to meet the needs in all the three domains in a balanced manner. About 6000 years ago – one thousand years before the *Mâhabhârata* war – India's downfall must have begun. So much so that Dharma began to gradually disappear. During this period, the humanity saw the birth of the religions – the oldest one being Judaism that appeared about 5000 years ago. Since then a host of religions have mushroomed on the earth; they continue to do so even now. It is significant to point out that the Indian languages do not quite have a word for religion while non-Indian languages do not have a word for Dharma. Though many use both the words interchangeably, these two words have very different meanings and characteristics. Actually, they are so much different that they cannot co-exist.

In modern age of science, we are familiar with the knowledge pertaining to matter that is contained in different branches of material sciences such as physics, chemistry, biology, etc. It is seen that this arm of knowledge has almost universal acceptance because it is based on logic, rigor and rationality. The religions claim to pertain to the spiritual world. But it is seen that no religion has near-universal acceptance because every religion has one or more dogmatic ideas void of rationality. We see that most of the conflicts and wars have their origin in religions. On the other hand, Dharma had universal acceptance as was the case in India until 6000 years ago. Even now the world can be united under Dharma if it is explained properly to every human being.

Further characteristics of Dharma and religion will be described. It will be convincingly brought out that Dharma can be a strong unifying force for the entire humanity. It will be further established that the Vedas describe Dharma in a total sense as was declared by Manu: *vedo-akhilo dharmamûlam* and



dharmajijõasamânânâm pramâ?am paramam cœrutih. Dharma presents a holistic approach for our progress. Indeed, Kanada, the author of *Vaiœœ?ika-Darœœana* defined Dharma saying, *yato abhyudaya nicœreyas siddhi sa dharmah*, i.e. what gives rise to progress in both material and spiritual realms can only be called dharma.

Present acceptance of meditation practices worldwide indicates that the scientific temper of the modern man is open towards Dharma, which can be called scientific spirituality in a limited sense to highlight the missing spiritual link in the modern man's progress. It is seen that the best brains today engaged in the study of the material sciences hesitate to explore the creator while unraveling the mysteries of the creation. So to say, they appreciate the great art that this beautiful world is, without bothering to know the artist who must be the most beautiful. Dharma, because of its rationality and rigor, can satisfy the needs in all dimensions of every searching soul. Furthermore, it can lead the humanity towards universal love, brotherhood and peace.

INTRODUCTION:

The Sanskrit word "Dharma" does not have an equivalent English word. In a similar way, the English word "Religion" does not have an equivalent Sanskrit word. However, many use these two words as synonymous. The word "Dharma" is derived from the root - *dh?õ dhâraõ* - to behold (a set of do's and don'ts) [1]. In essence "Dharma" is the principle of cosmic order. Religion is basically a Latin word and is based on the belief in worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or Gods. These fundamental differences between "Dharma" and "Religion" set the two apart. The history of the mankind is a witness to the fact that the differences in religions have been a source of suffering and misery virtually for all human beings throughout the world. Followers of different religions in the same country or in different countries may develop many differences. These differences can become the source of conflict and even may lead to war among peoples of two religions or two countries. However, the followers of two or more religions throughout the world do not disagree when it comes to their understanding of the modern science and technology. No significant conflict is observed in the practices pertaining to different faculties of modern science and technology. Followers of all religions agree that an atom consists of electrons and nucleus. The objective of this paper is to present a comparative study of Dharma and religion under the scrutiny of modern science and technology. Furthermore, the paper presents some teachings of the Vedas to demonstrate their scientific and rigorous basis, and they can direct us towards Dharma.

OPEN QUESTIONS:

Virtually all religions have a starting date, which is of the order of a couple of thousand of years. A number of recent scientific studies have indicated that human beings have been around for almost million years. As an example, the presence of burned seeds, wood, and flint at the Acheulian site of the Gescher Benot Ya'aqov in Israel is suggestive of the control of fire by humans nearly 790,000 years ago [2]. With constant improvement in the detection ability of our electronic

instruments, in future it is expected that even longer time for the existence of human beings will be established. Looking at the longevity of religions, one has to answer the question: how did man meet his spiritual needs before these religions came into existence?

Another important question relates to the universality of the knowledge that man constantly acquires. It is seen that the knowledge based on the belief in the religious books does not find acceptance by the people adhering to the other religions. But there happens to be a body of knowledge that has universal acceptance and that can stand tall under the scrutiny of modern science and technology. In the present context, Dharma and Religion need be examined from this point of view.

KNOWLEDGE AND DHARMA:

The Vedas are the repositories of knowledge that was revealed to the mankind at the dawn of the civilization. The word 'Veda' means knowledge, being derived from the root *vid jõâne* - to know, to understand [1]. The Vedas are the books of all true knowledge and they have been considered as the books of the ultimate authority in the Indian classical tradition. There is not a single scientific fact known to the mankind that is not in accordance with the Vedic knowledge. For example, the earth is a few billion years old in view of the classical Indian wisdom. Indeed, the recent finding reported in Reference [2] is in accordance with the Indian Vedic view but it contradicts with the books of Religion. Since there are no disagreements about the scientific and technical knowledge known to the mankind and what is mentioned in the Vedas, we will focus on the other areas that directly relate to world peace and human welfare for everyone. On a global level, the basic philosophy of the Vedas is 'transformation from individualism to collectivism without restricting the individual freedom.' The Vedas teach internationalism over nationalism, non-violence or 'Ahimsâ' in thought, word, and deed over violence, and such other lofty principles. The following *gvedic* hymn declares that God is omnipresent and those who do not care to study Vedas cannot expect to live in joy and peace.

**co ak?are paramœ vyoman yasmin devâ adhi viœœve ni?eduh
Yastanna veda kim?câ kari?yati ya itadvidusta ime
samâsate (*gv. 1.164.39)*

i.e. all the noble human beings and the sun, the earth and all other heavenly bodies reside in the omnipresent infinite and eternal God. How can one live in joy and peace without knowing Him? Indeed, the primary objective of the Vedas is to convey the knowledge about that infinite entity God.

One has to live in the world with legitimate material requirements met and then only one can progress in the spiritual pursuits leading to the knowledge about God by direct experience, called *brahma-sâk?âtkâra*. This being the case, the Vedas must contain all the true knowledge in requisite measure for the mankind to be able to raise itself to the ultimate objective of the human life - the *brahma-sâk?âtkâra*. In particular, the Vedas must include the ethics and the code of conduct for all of us to live in harmony along with the knowledge about the material things. The widest connotation of the moral code of



conduct is conveyed by the word Dharma. As one would expect, the Vedas must have been the first and foremost in teaching Dharma to the mankind, and so was declared by Manu: *vedo-akhilodharma mûlam*.

Presented below are some Vedic hymns to highlight the universality contained therein. A glimpse of the Vedic prayers indicates that no reasonable human being will have any objection in uttering the same. Furthermore, the prayers tend to uplift every one of us from individualism to collectivism. This is attested by the fact that the prayers are invariably in plural form. They desire the well being of all human beings and even that of the other creatures. Many other hymns show the key core human values as given in Vedas and are part of the Dharma [4].

On Universal Peace

**Dyau? ûântirantarik°am œânti? p°thivî ûântirâpa?
ûântiro°adhayah œânti?**

*Vanaspatayah ûântir viûvedevâ? ûântirbrahma ûântih sarvam
ûântih ûântireva ûânti? sâ mâ ûântiredhi (Yv 36.17)*

Due to your grace, there is peace throughout the universe while every bit of its component is functioning in an orderly manner. May we be guided to live in this world with this feeling of peace every moment.

On Unity:

**Sam gacchadhvam sam vadadhvam sam vo manânsi
jânâtâm**

Devâ bhâgam yathâ pûrve samjânânâ upâsate ("gv, 10.191.2)

For the organization of society, all should work together in unity, speak with one voice, and think alike.

Samâni va âkuti? samânâ h°dayâni vah

Samânamastu vo mano yathâ va? susahâsati ("gv 10.191.4)

Thoughts arise from the mind and intellect. We should achieve our aims with mutual faith and love.

All Man are Alike

*Ajyeshphâso akanisphâsa ete sam bhrâtaro vâv°dhu? saubhagâya
Yuvâ pitâ svapâ rudra e°âm sudughâ p°ûni? sudinâ
marudbhya? ("gv 5.60.5)*

In the society no one is higher or lower. The natural resources should be utilized for all the welfare of all citizens.

Prayer for Purity of the Intellect

Bhûrbhuva? sva?

Tatsaviturvareðyam bhargo devasya dhîmahî

Dhiyo yo na? pracodayât (Yv 36.3)

May our intellect be constantly guided by the Infinite Lustre of Thee.

Freedom of Speech

Ak°adrugdho râjanyah pâpa âtmaparâjita?

Sa brhmadasya gâmadyâdadya ñivâni mâ úva? (Av 5.18.2)

The rulers fail in their duties if the people can not exercise their freedom of speech.

Good Qualities Sustain Society

*Satyam b°had°tamugram dik°â tapo brahma yajôah pthivîm
dhârayanti*

Sâ no bhutasya bhavyasya patnyurum lokam p°thivî nah k°dotu (Av 12.1.1)

Uprightness, a strong sense of justice, steadfastness, perseverance, intellect and benevolence constitute desirable human qualities. A community with such people will definitely live in peace.

The Prestige and Respect of Women

Mama putrâ? úatruhadôtho me duhitâ virâp

Utâhamasmi saðjayâ patyau me úloka uttama? ("v 10.159.3)

I enjoy success in all I undertake and reach the goals I set for myself. I enjoy supreme honor and dignity in my husband's family. This enables me to raise my sons and daughters with noble qualities.

A detailed list of the differences between "Dharma" and "Religion" appears at the end of the paper in Table I.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

The primary difference between Dharma and religion is that the former is universal while latter is sectarian. The former is eternal and beginning-less while the latter has a beginning. The former originates with the revelation of the Vedas at the dawn of the mankind while the latter is due to a mortal human being. These major characteristics cause religion to become divisive forces as has been witnessed in the history of a couple of thousand years. In the present world torn apart with conflict and strife, Dharma can be the potent unifying force.

The present paper has presented basically two main points. First, Dharma and religion are two different things. Second, some hymns from the Vedas have been presented to demonstrate the universal and true meanings that they carry, which can embody the Dharma. This has been the traditional view since time immemorial in India that the Vedas should be studied to understand what Dharma is. Indeed, Jaimini in his treatise *Mîmânsa-Darûana* (1.1.2) defines Dharma as the teachings of the Vedas: *codanâ lak°adârtho dharmâ?.* (i.e., the teachings of the Vedas constitute Dharma).

REFERENCES:

[1] Pâðini, *Dhâtupâpha*

[2] N. Goren-Inbar, N. Alpers, M. E. Kislev, O. Simchoni, Y. Melamed, A. B-Nun, and E. Worker, "Evidence of Hominin Control of Fire at Gesher Benot Ya'aqov, Israel", *Science*, vol. 304, pp. 725-727, 2004.

[3] D. Chandora, "Hindu Shatakam", 2000

[4] Pandit Naradev Vedalkar, "Shastra Navantiam", Durban, SA

[5] T. Acharya, "Dharma and Religion",

http://www.here-now4u.de/eng/dharma_and_religion.htm